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Foreign policy failures mapped by Brzezinski

By Richard Falk.

ONE SHOE HAS fallen: that of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who voluntarily resigned in response to the rejection of his foreign policy approach.

It is now time for President Carter to kick off the other shoe: national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, whose record of repeated failures in foreign policy has brought the nation to its present impasse.

Let us consider the record of this man who now all but openly charts the nation's course through the Mideast storm.

The single greatest feature of Brzezinski's foreign policy has been his consistently militarist approach to almost every international policy crisis the Carter administration has confronted. This single-minded approach has fueled an American faith in military power which has blinded the nation to the limited utility of force in the complex world of the 1980s.

THE HOSTAGE RESCUE fiasco is illustrative of this misplaced faith. But long before the rescue effort was mounted, the problem could be seen in the thinly disguised tug-of-war between the diplomatic approach represented by Vance and the militaristic approach represented by Brzezinski.

Indeed, to point a finger at Brzezinski identifies only the most glaring defects of Carter's approach to foreign policy. Carter himself seems genuinely in over his head and may have allowed Vance and Brzezinski to generate opposing lines so as to evade the responsibility of standing behind any particular direction.

Brzezinski's hard line emerged long before he joined the Carter administration. More ardently than most hawks, he went down to the last wire supporting the American intervention in Viet Nam, counselling a tough stance against domestic dissent. Later, he supported American military intervention in Angola.

As national security adviser, Brzezinski has been consistently associated with anti-detente views, ranging from turning human rights in an anti-Soviet direction to favoring an accelerated arms race. Most relevantly, Brzezinski was associated with a die-hard, pro-shah policy. Throughout the Iranian revolution, he counseled "decisiveness" by the shah, namely maximum and brutal use of state power against unarmed mass demonstrations.

Late in the game, when most others in Washington had given up on the shah, Brzezinski continued to plot for his survival. He even circumvented the American embassy in Tehran by having a special military officer, Gen. Robert Huyser, report directly, on a daily basis, to the White House.

We now know what was long suspected, namely, that Gen. Huyser was in Iran to incite a military coup at an opportune moment that never came. We also know that Brzezinski counseled Carter against any acknowledgement of the Khomeini movement long after its triumph was a virtual certainty.

The background is relevant to the whole deterioration of the American position in Iran, contributing directly to the embassy crisis. It was Brzezinski who was the voice in Carter's ear, favoring continued friendship with the shah after his departure from Iran in 1979. In this regard, the publicized shah lobby of David Rockefeller and Henry Kissinger was reinforced by the entrenched presence of Brzezinski in the White House.

The triangular relationship of forces created pressure to admit the shah to the U.S. last fall, despite all the indications that such a step would critically damage our relations with the Iranian revolution, as well as undermine, as it did, the position of moderates in the Iranian governing process. Even the embassy seizure was foreseen as a possible consequence of the shah's admission here.

Then came the Soviet move into Afghanistan and the Brzezinski-orchestrated American overreaction to it. Brzezinski — photographed firing a machine gun across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border — struck fast and prevailed. Since then, the illusion that only military approaches — macho diplomacy — can solve the problems faced by the U.S. abroad has grown alarmingly.

IN THE MOST TRUCULENT State of the Union address in more than a decade, President Carter virtually revived the Cold War. He proposed the creation of a mobile interventionary force for use in the Middle East and a new charter for the CIA that would fully restore its mandate to engage in covert operations overseas, also moving the U.S. closer to a draft and a bigger defense budget. At the same time, he withdrew the SALT agreement from the Senate and imposed a variety of sanctions on the Soviet Union.

The subsequent hostage rescue plan was not only a failure on the operational level but a diplomatic and constitutional disaster. American allies had been cajoled against their better judgment to go along with economic sanctions against Iran because they feared that otherwise military force might be used. Despite assurances to the contrary, the U.S. government nevertheless unilaterally embarked on a risky military adventure. The resulting loss of confidence and trust by Western Europe and Japan in the Carter administration is a serious price to pay in the nuclear age.

The mainstream political debate is now moving precariously along a narrow divide between Brzezinski-style militarism and Kissinger-style militarism. Only the removal of Brzezinski from the Carter team could restore some sense of choice between the Democratic and Republican party approaches to the protection of American interests abroad.

To those who would argue that the rejection of an all-out militarist solution might be political suicide in these times of growing public anger, the President need only point to the recent failures of militarist policy. Given a forceful and determined spokesman for the diplomatic path — a role which Vance was too statesmanlike to play successfully — public opinion might easily be swayed towards reason.

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